

WARRIOR

SUMMER 2022



HMCS LABRADOR

Bell Helicopter

HMCS Shearwater the Birthplace of Canadian Naval Aviation from

1948-1968

In June the CDS and CAF CWO recognized six CAF members for their outstanding professionalism and dedication. Congratulations to these deserving soldiers, sailors, and aviators. [#BravoZulu!](#)

- CPO1 P.G. Harel - **Royal Canadian Navy**
- WO E.A. White - **Canadian Army**
- MWO J.J.N.G. Durand - **Royal Canadian Air Force**
- MCpl M.L. Moore - Vice Chief of the Defence Staff
- MBdr S.P. Ricard - **Canadian Armed Forces Operations**
- MCpl J.D. Girard - Chief Military Personnel



Government organization

Official Canadian Armed Forces Facebook page.

forces.gc.ca/en/terms-conditions.page#social

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Submissions: Text submissions can be either paper, email or electronically produced in Word.

We will format the text for you. No need to centre headings, indent paragraphs etc. Graphics are best submitted electronically; they should be 300 dpi and a .tif file. A jpg file at 300 dpi is acceptable if no compression is used.

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Deadlines for receiving submissions are:

Spring 1 March
Summer 15 June
Winter 15 October

Stories should be no more than 6 pages long. Send only when you have finalized.

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COVER PHOTO: Shearwater Aviation Museum Archives.

Inside Front: CF Facebook page Recognition

Inside back Photo: Poster by Peter Robichaud

Back cover: HMCS REGINA sails through the South China Sea during Operation PROJECTION Asia Pacific, March 15, 2019. Photo: Master Corporal Alexandre Gagnon XA01-2019-0035-234

****WE NEED YOUR SUBMISSIONS.**
 Please send us your stories, pictures etc. We look forward to hearing from you. Any opinions expressed herein are deemed to be those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Shearwater Aviation Museum Foundation, its members, the Shearwater Aviation Museum and or 12 Wing Shearwater.

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FROM THE CURATOR'S DESK

By Christine Hines

Happy news! By the time this issue of the “Warrior” arrives in your mailbox, the SAM will have reopened for the first time since 13 March 2020! I am so very grateful to all of the SAM Foundation members, 12 Wing, the SAMF and SAM Board of Directors/Trustees, and Personnel Support Programs for your support. Thanks to those of you who made purchases from our shop, or just took the time to ask how we were holding up over the last few years-it meant a lot to the few of us holding down the fort.

While it might take us a little bit to get back in the groove, we will catch some of the summer visit season, and look forward to our souvenir sales outlet at Air Show Atlantic, and some smaller exhibit installations that we will have completed by the time you’re reading this article.

We have a new teammate to tell you about, courtesy of the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP): Bedford resident Yanna Tsedryk has been hired as an Education Program Assistant for SAM this summer, until 31 August 2022. A fourth year Bachelor of Education student at Queen’s University in Kingston ON, Yanna has created a program/activity room for younger visitors, complete with reading nook, crafts and activities, as small children’s programming has not been very robust at SAM to date. Yanna is also working on Theory of Flight curriculum programming for use in learning kits for teachers, to be loaned for practical activities in the classroom: if the classes can’t have a guest speaker come to the school or come to the museum for a presentation, these kits will be a useful asset. Yanna is also looking at ways to integrate new virtual tools into our education program offerings. Welcome Yanna!

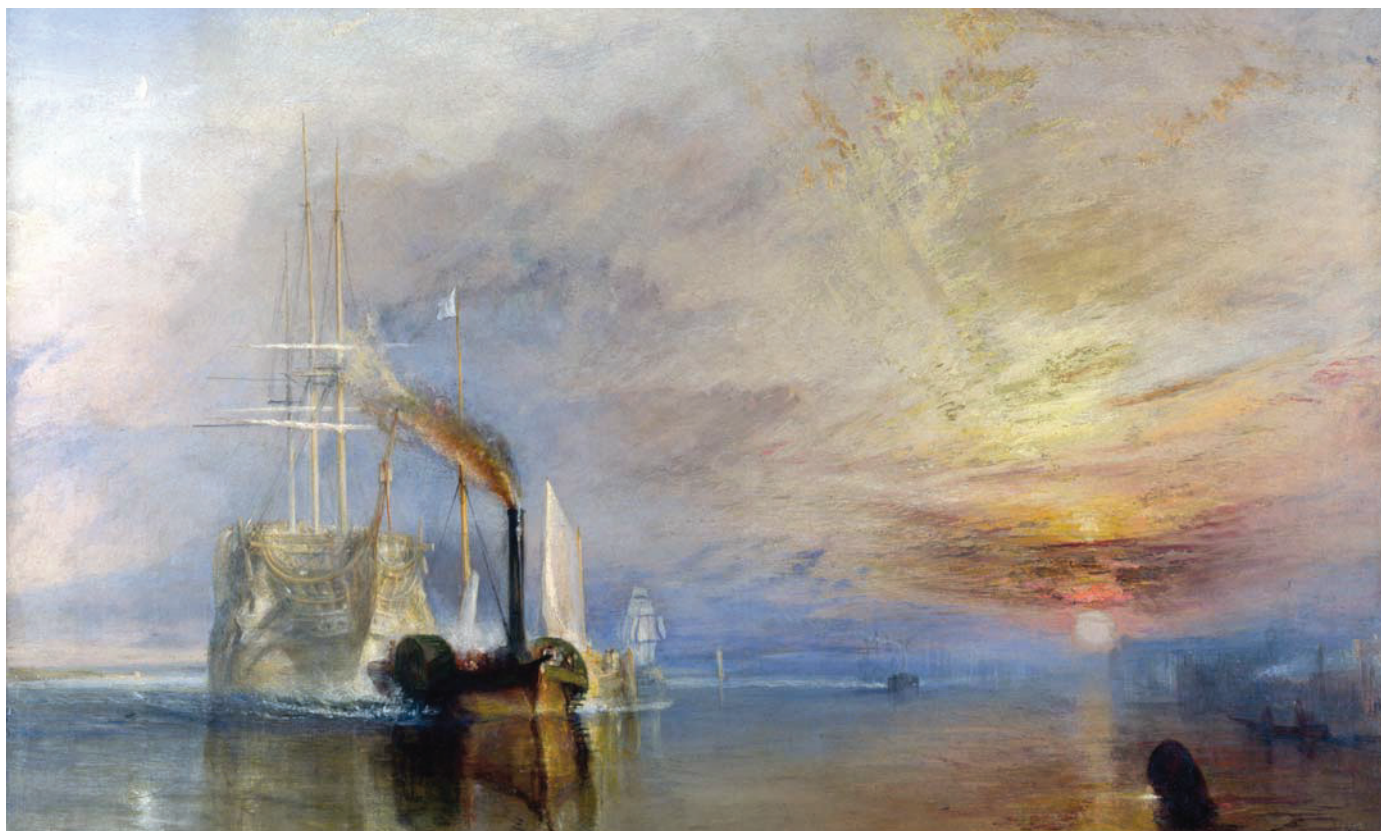
While we prepare to greet our visitors again, and get back to some semblance of normal operations, I’d like to beg your patience as we get cleaned up and the exhibits tidied up.

In closing, I’d like to send congratulations to our friends at 423 MH Squadron on celebrating their 80th anniversary this year, culminating with an anniversary event this week. 423 MH Squadron have always been history minded, and excited to commemorate this milestone along with the Squadron members and 12 Wing.

In closing, we are wishing you a happy and safe summer, and hope to see you at SAM soon! (I’m very happy we can say that again!

Sailing to Byzantium: A Eulogy to the Sea King

Jeff Tasseron



Credit: Joseph M.W. Turner, via The National Gallery

Joseph M.W. Turner's 1839 *The Fighting Temeraire* is one of the most famous paintings of the Royal Navy's transition from sail to steam. Trafalgar veteran HMS *Temeraire* is shown being towed by a steam-powered tugboat to the breakers in 1838. The original painting hangs in the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, London.

....O, Titan *Téméraire*,
Your stern-lights fade away;
Your bulwarks to the years must yield,
And heart-of-oak decay.

A pigmy steam-tug tows you,
Gigantic, to the shore –
Dismantled of your guns and spars,
And sweeping wings of war.
The rivets clinch the iron-clads,
Men learn a deadlier lore;

But Fame has nailed your battle-flags
Your ghost it sails before:
O, the navies old and oaken,
O, the *Téméraire* no more!

Extract from "The *Téméraire*," Herman Melville

In the National Gallery in London, there hangs a work of art entitled "The Fighting *Téméraire* tugged to her last berth to be broken up, 1838." It was painted in 1839 by English artist J.M.W Turner, and depicts the hulk of HMS *Téméraire* being hauled by steamship to a shipbreaker's

yard to be dismantled – her brass and fittings to be removed, and her timber to be broken up and sold to house-builders and furniture-makers. The picture, with a sombre yet luminous palette of yellows and browns, is a romanticized depiction not only of the passing of a noble warship out of service, but also of the march of technology. With the plume of the steam tug's coal smoke obscuring the ghostly rigging, and the burning sun setting over distant towers, the painting evokes a nostalgic, mournful sense of the closing of an era, and the final, somewhat dreary, end of something that was once great and good.

With the December 2018 retirement of the CH-124 Sea King now complete, and the remaining fleet of aircraft awaiting disposal, one might be inclined to regard Canada's oldest and most deployed combat aircraft much in the same vein as the mighty *Téméraire*. Certainly, the parallels are many. Like *Téméraire*, the Sea Kings were very much an expression of the best technology that their time could offer, but they were ever-fated to labour somewhat in anonymity. Similarly, throughout the operational history of both vessels, their greatest accomplishments were not as much rooted in the excellence of their design



Credit: Cpl Jeffrey Clement, 19 Wing Imaging

The sun sets on a CH-124 Sea King helicopter in Smithers, British Columbia, during *Operation Lentus* 18-5 on 27 August 2018 – the last summer before retirement.

(however compelling), but in the use to which their crews put them, under duress and peril. Finally, much like *Téméraire*, the Sea Kings struggled to remain relevant and capable through to the end of their service; foreordained to be superseded by newer and presumably better ships, yet curiously resilient in reputation despite the slings and arrows of the years. So now, as the day is upon us when the last Sea King is rolled from the hangar and placed on a flatbed to be taken away, is the CH-124 Sea King fated to become Canada's *Téméraire*?

A Second-Rate Ship

With the exception of her role in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, HMS *Téméraire* actually had a mostly uneventful service life during the Napoleonic period in which she saw operations. Ordered in 1790, her keel was laid down in 1793, and she was launched in 1798. Commissioned as a 'ship of the line' – that is, intended to take station on a gun line during major naval engagements, *Téméraire* was identified as 'second rate' according to the Royal Navy classification system. This indicated that while she had three full gun decks (and in fact carried nearly as much armament as a larger, 'first-rate' ship), *Téméraire* was of generally cheaper construction, smaller and slower. However, given that second-rate ships were much less expensive to build, and were generally more survivable under adverse sailing conditions, they tended to serve in the farther deployed operating stations of the Empire, which were often considered too risky for first-rate flagships.

For its part, at the time of its introduction into Canadian service in 1963, the Sea King embodied a revolutionary design that reflected the increasingly mature operational

capability of rotary wing aircraft. Initially selected by the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) to replace the Sikorsky HO4S-3 'Horse' anti-submarine warfare helicopter in the aircraft carrier HMCS *Bonaventure*, the Sea King was soon operating from the decks of the navy's destroyer escorts. This laid the foundation for modern shipboard helicopter operations – a concept that has been widely copied around the world. Nevertheless, primarily due to the cardinal sin of having many small wings moving in a rotary fashion, rather than two large ones moving not at all, the Sea King was doomed to 'second-rate' status from the outset – even more so upon the transition of naval air operations to the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).

That said, like *Téméraire*, this second-rate craft proved extremely resilient and well-suited to operations in the far-flung skies and on the oceans of the world. Perhaps not the most beautiful aircraft, with its bulbous sponsons, aggressive boat-like jawline, and propensity to leak fluids more or less continuously, there was always something purposeful and utilitarian about the Sea King. Particularly as its operational roles expanded, and the community hung ever more esoteric pieces of additional kit on it – flare and chaff dispensers, electro-optical/infra-red cameras, missile warning and jamming devices, various door guns – the inner beauty began to come to the fore.

This was where the real genius of Sikorsky's masterpiece – the Sea King – shone through: a strongly-built keel, well-timbered (so to speak), with structural members that could be removed or repaired in place. With more or less predictable stress load paths and excellent corrosion predictability, its engines and gearbox were well matched. It

was heavy, relatively wind-resistant and yet not ponderous near the deck, with even a touch of nimbleness in the hands of an experienced flier – particularly when suitably motivated by a suddenly rolling ship! To stand under the Sea King when slinging or refuelling was to be reminded of the power of its design, to be simultaneously beaten by the brutal downwash and sound, while remaining astonished by the quickness of its motion, and by the sheer bumblebee improbability of such a large object suspended in flight directly over one’s head.

Undaunted in Battle

Despite an exceptionally long and incredibly varied service history, totaling more than 55 years, it must be said that by most conventional measures of combat aircraft, the CH-124 Sea King had an illustrious but relatively peaceable operational pedigree. Although nearly continuously deployed, and usually in considerable numbers, this Cold War weapon never dropped a torpedo in anger in the service of Canada. Even with a door gun mounted and well-operated, it could never be mistaken for a gunship. The few shots ever fired in anger were probably of greater moral comfort to the crews than mortal danger to the enemy.

Nevertheless, as any mariner will confirm, a true enemy was always close at hand in the form of the treacherous elements and the unforgiving ocean. In this arena, the Sea King proved itself to be without peer. From the very beginning, Canadian naval aviation prided itself on operating the largest aircraft from the smallest decks in the worst weather. A well-practiced detachment could put its aircraft into the air in less than 12 minutes from a dead

sleep – and often did. In the dark of a North Atlantic night, with a 35-knot gale and sea state 6, every launch was a combat mission, every landing a test of nerve and skill.

It must also be acknowledged that black humour and blacker coffee fueled Sea King operations as much as JP-5. It was called an ‘all weather aircraft’ because all weather got in, and it was never a leak that was cause for concern, rather the lack of one. On a regular basis, day in and decade out, the Sea King saw service that would have destroyed most other aircraft. But sometimes, usually for want of spares, it just wouldn’t go, and sat in the hangar week after week until the maintenance crews thought they would be better off rolling it overboard. And sometimes, thankfully infrequently, measured against the thousands of hours and the long years, a Sea King faltered and failed – a burnt capacitor here, a gearbox anomaly there, rivets made of the wrong metal and not caught, and dead shipmates to remember in mess dinner toasts and cairns on mountain tops and in the faces of wives and children. We began with 41 Sea Kings, and we end with 24, each one of those departed ships carrying with it a small piece of the collective history of the community – if fortunately not a grave marker for its crew, then certainly a memorial to the memories of those who flew it and fixed it and gave it a greater life than that to which most inanimate objects could ever hope to aspire.

The Stalwart Warrior

Indeed, during its long years, the Sea King definitely lived well and got around. Once the basic procedures for shipboard flight operations had been laid down, and



A Sea King helicopter, nicknamed Blackhorse, flies next to HMCS St. John's during Operation Reassurance in the Baltic Sea in March 2018. This view shows off the helicopter's boat-like 'keel' and somewhat awkward sponsons.

Credit: Cpl Tony Chand, Formation Imaging Services



The Helicopter Hauldown and Rapid Securing Device, or Beartrap, was introduced on the RCN's destroyers, enabling Sea Kings to operate from small decks in almost any condition. Here, a Sea King approaches HMCS Assiniboine some time before September 1964. The rectangular Beartrap can be seen on the deck.

in particular once the Helicopter Hauldown and Rapid Securing Device (or Beartrap) had been installed in the RCN's destroyer fleet in the mid-1960s, the stage was set for deployments in every ocean. Beginning in steamers and the mighty *Bonnie*, a generation of intrepid old salts learned hard lessons and honed their craft plying the deeps (and skies) of the cold Atlantic and mighty Pacific. The conditions were hard. Aircrew roundsmen roped in to make the hazardous trek from the flag deck, back over the superstructure to the comforting red gloom of the hangar, with ice dams as large as two fists on the knotted lines, and the HF antenna whips so coated with ice they seemed like glistening tree trunks, pointing starward.

There, in the hangar, once the hatch was closed and dogged shut, was the Sea King – as patient as an old hound, swaying and creaking on its oleos as the waves made the chain lashings swing and the warm expansion joints above the boilers open and close. For young aircrew and maintenance personnel, there were so many rites of passage one could lose count: crossing the line, doing the pipes in the wardroom, that first 12-hour deck cycle, being sent for a length of shore line, driving the replenishment-at-sea, approach, standing second officer of the watch, star shots for beers, punching the ship's navigator bloody in the forward rope stores with a lucky fist, a visit to the Black Angus in San Juan. When it wasn't cold it was hot – paint ship routine in Puerto Rico, pasta alongside in Trieste, dolphins and fin whales off of Mallorca. In an eye blink, the young face that looked at you in the mirror became the Major or Warrant Officer, taking the detachment to sea, sorting out the knuckleheads, receiving a dressing down from the XO or Captain, then closing up later with them for a restorative coffee.

And always the backdrop, the bird – everything at sea and ashore revolved around the Sea King. Fickle, demanding, hard to fly, harder to fight, hardest to fix. In the crew rooms and messes there were always the big talkers, the outsize egos – but in the aircraft, all bowed before the King. All were humbled, neither man nor woman ever escaped their moment of fear or doubt at the controls; all were broken, and those found worthy were recast, stronger than before, members of a fraternity that stretched and stretched, but didn't break.



Credit: MCpl Carbe Orellana, MARPAC Imaging Services

"...all bowed before the King." Here, HMCS Winnipeg's Sea King hovers above the ship during Exercise Poseidon Cutlass 17 on 16 July 2017.

...I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds...
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight...

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

Extract from "Idylls of the King: The Passing of Arthur," Alfred, Lord Tennyson

As the Cold War wound down, Sea Kings found employment supporting Canada's contribution to the first Gulf War in 1990-91, and soon thereafter saw service ashore in Somalia in 1992-93 in support of *Operation Deliverance*. Sea King detachments conducted flight operations in the far North, supported NATO, contributed to United Nations operations in East Timor, and conducted counter-piracy missions off the East Coast of Africa. Sea King crews rescued sailors, conducted medical evacuations, delivered disaster relief assistance, and saved lives in Haiti. When Canada needed an aircraft suitable for low and slow air interdiction, it turned to the Sea King. Support to the Olympics in Vancouver? Check. Need to transport a large load of illicitly cultivated marijuana to a suitable site for destruction? A Sea King can do that as well. Still the consummate Cold War weapon, the Sea King also learned to love – tons of water and food to a land ravaged by earthquake, and a young girl, her hand crushed, delivered to comfort and care.

With the passage of years, and as operational needs continued to evolve, it steadily became clear to all – even to detractors – that the Sea King was something special, both as an aircraft and as a symbol of resilience for a flying and sailing community. Perhaps one of the most intriguing footnotes to the history of HMS *Téméraire* is that prior to her pivotal role at Trafalgar, there had been talk of decommissioning the ship. Starved of maintenance funding, she had been allowed to sink into decrepit condition, and was not felt to be seaworthy any longer. It was only through a substantial infusion of funding (amounting to almost 25% of her original purchase price) that *Téméraire* was reconditioned and returned to the fleet in good order. So too with the Sea King, which despite making a brilliant showing in support of *Operation Friction*, suffered greatly due to maintenance funding reductions predicated on the imminent arrival of the new replacement helicopters that were supposed to come in the 1990s.



Credit: David Cox

A CH-148 Cyclone flies over HMCS *St. John's* in February 2019 during a day sail.

After the post-election cancellation of that program in 1993 the Sea King fleet continued to degrade, and by the late 1990s was clearly in need of a major refit program to ensure its continued safety and mechanical viability. This critical maintenance intervention resulted in significant structural rejuvenation of the aircraft, and paved the way for the introduction of new engines and gearboxes. Though not often mentioned as one of the key factors in the overall success of the aircraft in its final years of service, without this extensive reinvestment, the Sea King fleet would not likely have been viable for long enough to allow an uninterrupted transition to the CH-148 Cyclone, and certainly would not have been able to perform operationally as it did throughout the last decade.

The Once and Future King

Although lauded as a symbol of heroism and hardiness at Trafalgar, where she came to the aid of Nelson's flagship at a critical point, fending off and ultimately capturing two French vessels, by 1812 *Téméraire* had been removed from service. She then passed from the unexceptional-yet-dignified status as a second-rate ship to become a prison hulk and, later, a storage depot. Though the painting depicts HMS *Téméraire* with masts and furled sails, by the time she was auctioned for the value of her timbers and hardware, the ship was a shadow of her former glory, with neither masts nor rigging. Turner's image thus romanticizes what can only be regarded as an ignoble end – a powerful former symbol of British military naval might rendered obsolete by technology, perhaps accompanied in decline by the qualities of martial spirit and determination, the very 'heart of oak' that imbued the proud vessel with such vitality during her prime.

It is here, thankfully, where the analogy between HMS *Téméraire* and the Sea King begins to falter. For although the retirement from service of the Sea Kings indeed marks the changeover of an older technology to a newer – mechanical systems giving way to fly by wire, and radar and

sonar equipment that has been obsolete since the 1980s now being superseded by highly integrated sensor suites – in a twist of irony we see a surprising return to something quite akin to the geopolitical and military strategic situation that faced the Sea Kings at the very outset of their service. Instead of the ghostly *Téméraire*, identifiable only by the battle flags fame has nailed to her mast, and with a role and utility now as obsolete as the sails that once carried her to battle, are we not now seeing a resurgence of the need that drove the Sea Kings to persevere over 55 years to ensure that they were always ready for whatever role was demanded?

It may not be much to celebrate, that Canada still needs naval air, and perhaps will need yet more in the future. But at the very least, as we see new crews grappling with how to bring the newest incarnation of the Sea King, the CH-148 Cyclone, into service, there should be some comfort that the keel around which the maritime air community will be rebuilt – the shared heritage of its men and women – has been strengthened rather than weakened by the passage of time.

But what of the noble ship itself? It may seem all well and good to talk of the people, and the ethos left behind as a legacy, and the growing need of this newly uncertain world but what of those last proud warriors, the final remaining individual aircraft? Are they not to be trucked to the scrap heap, sold for such value as can be extracted from them, destined for the same sad fate as that noble ship being pulled down the Thames so long ago, silhouetted against a setting sun? After all, is this not a eulogy?

In fact, it is not. For as I write these words, at the end of February 2019, the remaining 15 airworthy aircraft of the CH-124 Sea King fleet have been sold. Not for scrap, or to molder away as gate guardians, or to be turned into holiday glamping cottages – although, in fairness to the Steedman family, they did a lovely job of renovating their ex-Royal Navy Sea King; I particularly admire the addition of a proper lavatory to replace the much-beloved helicopter voice control/relief tube. While the details of the transaction cannot yet be shared, pending finalization of demilitarization requirements and US State Department third-party transfer approvals, the intent of this acquisition is to refit, renew and ultimately return some or all of the aircraft to operational status. With the average age (in flight hours) of the fleet being less than half of that of comparable aircraft still in service, and particularly given the exquisitely thorough maintenance performed on the Sea Kings throughout their RCN and RCAF service life, it is entirely possible that the CH-124 will indeed take its rightful place among the pantheon of the world’s longest-serving military aircraft. If so, it will join such luminaries

Credit: Timothy Choi



Fifteen Canadian Sea Kings have been sold to as-yet unknown buyers. With many operators around the world, the possibilities are numerous. Here, a Sea King operated by the Norwegian Air Force conducts a training exercise near Norway in January 2018.

as the C-47 Dakota, the C-130 Hercules and the B-52 Stratofortress, all of which have remained in service, in form fundamentally unaltered from their original conception.

And so, while the ultimate fate of the fleet is far from certain, it appears that the time for a true eulogy for the Sea King has not yet arrived. Therefore, instead of returning to the theme of HMS *Téméraire*, and to the description of the painting of that worthy vessel being towed to her final fate, I would close with the words of a different British artist, William Butler Yeats:

*... An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.*

Extract from “Sailing to Byzantium,” William Butler Yeats

We have all sailed the seas together, with this fine helicopter. Sometimes it has been a friend, other times a foe, for some, it has been an obsession, but it has always been a companion. And so, each in our own way, we have all arrived at Byzantium. 🍷

Jeff Tasseron is a naval aviator, and the former Commanding Officer of 423 Maritime Helicopter Squadron. He is currently the Director of Business Development for ICT and Public Safety at the Canadian Commercial Corporation.

HMCS LABRADOR - Peter Point, York Sound, Frobisher Bay, Baffin Island
Crash of Navy Bells HTL-4, S/N 202 and HTL-6, S/N 205
Friday 26 July 1957

**Original 1957 Story by
Stu Dunbrack
2013 Photo and Footnote Editing by
Don MacNeil**

The passenger, Sidney VAN DYCK, a Civilian Hydrographer attached to HMCS LABRADOR recalls. "I was first introduced to the Bell helicopter in 1956 during Arctic survey operations aboard LABRADOR. These little yellow machines with the characteristic plastic bubble could carry two passengers and made possible much of the hydrographic survey work carried out in the Arctic by LABRADOR."

"Early Friday morning, it must have been 6.30 or 7.00 o'clock, while operating in Frobisher Bay, we were getting ready to take some hydrographic measurements which would involve my flying to the top of Peter Point, a 2400-foot mountain in York Sound. The weather at sea level was perfect, hardly a breath of air, which was the reason for the early start. I had never liked wearing a "crash helmet", which were available on the flight deck, 'and I had got away with it because I was a civilian on a naval vessel.

This morning CPO Joseph (Joe) MALONE pressured me once again to wear a helmet and, just to be good to him, I put one on."

"The pilot for this flight was LCdr. B.F. (Bruce) VIBERT, DSC, OIC of the Detachment. After take-off and once we had acquired sufficient altitude, he headed direct for the mountain top and went straight in for a landing without the usual reconnaissance to find the best spot to land. We came in fast and made a very hard touchdown on a bit of a slope. The helicopter, Bell HTL-4 202, rolled over onto the passenger side. Amongst a lot of noise of rotors shredding themselves against the rocks I was thrown forward and hit the bubble in spite of the safety harness. Things happen rather quickly as one must always expect the worst which was, of course, the



HTL-4 S/N 202 Landing Result

*Photo Source: DND LAB 2463 Via LCdr. L. Zbitnew
Collection*



Between a Rock and a Hard Place

*Photo Source: DND LAB 2457 Via LCdr. L.
Zbitnew Collection*

possibility that the helicopter might explode. The noise stopped as quickly as it had begun and I climbed out of the hole in the bubble which I had broken with my head, LCdr. VIBERT climbed out of his side door which was facing skyward. We put some distance between ourselves and the helicopter and waited for what might happen. Nothing did so we returned to the helicopter to see what might be done next. The radio was still operational so LCdr. VIBERT made contact with the ship to report the crash. By now it became clear that our landing problems had been made much worse by the strong downdrafts at the site caused by the nearby Grinnel Glacier."



Lt. Larry Zbitnew to the Rescue in 205

Photo Source: DND LAB 2459 Via LCdr. L. Zbitnew Collection

"A second helicopter, Bell HTL-6 205, flown by Lt L.T. (Larry) ZBITNEW, which was heading for another hydrographic site was diverted to see if he could be of any help. He arrived not long afterwards and made a safe landing beside the wrecked Bell. By now the gusting downdrafts had become worse so Lt. ZBITNEW decided to leave his civilian passenger, Stu DUNBRACK, and all expendable gear and return to the ship. He almost made it. On lifting off he was caught in a gust and his tail rotor slammed into the ground leaving him stranded. Now there were four of us. We had some emergency rations and were not too concerned even though the only other helicopter aboard LABRADOR, Piasecki HUP-3 S/N 247 (51-16623), was undergoing main rotor blade rigging."¹



Last One in Turns Out the Lights

Photo Source: DND LAB 2473 Via LCdr. L. Zbitnew Collection

"Surely we could find a way to climb down the mountain. Three sides turned out to go 2400 feet straight down to the water with the fourth side, after a close look, remaining a very dicey possibility. This close look included a brief attempt to get over a sliding rubble field. I meant to give it a try. With a quarter inch rope tied to my belt I ventured a few steps across this rubble to what appeared to be a more solid ledge. When I looked back, I saw the person holding the other end of the rope in his hands could not possibly hold me if I started slipping. I made it back to more stable ground and counted myself lucky.

¹ Fifty-six years later in 2013 LCdr. Larry ZBITNEW Ret'd recalled the following: "The picture of the Bell hovering was taken just before I was forced to land. The winds were gusting upwards of 50 mph, and there was a real bad down draft present. I had stripped the Bell with all unnecessary equipment and off loaded my hydrographer to make it as light as possible. Still, I had trouble maintaining hover RPM, s. It crossed my mind to slide over to the side of the mountain and throw it over the side but then I recall thinking that if the blades contacted the side of the mountain, it would have been a 2500-foot drop to the bottom. I then decided to land instead and on landing, my tail rotor contacted a rock and the was that."

Time wore on and by mid-afternoon the gusting winds were getting worse. Work on HUP 247 was proceeding at a good pace and a test flight was scheduled for late afternoon. At the same time a mountain rescue team was organized aboard LABRADOR in case the HUP could not be made serviceable. There was no chance in these increased wind conditions that the HUP pilot, Lt D.A.(Dave) OLIPHANT with crewman LS Charles CANN, could get close enough to affect a rescue so it was planned to drop some food and water to us in the early evening². The food was no problem, but the water was in jerry cans wrapped in mattresses which burst on impact. A second flight was made at 0430 Saturday morning and this time they dropped us a lot of ice cubes in a sack. Our water problems were solved."³

" The decision was made to try and to pick us up at first light the next day. That was the time of least air movement from Grinnel Glacier and therefore, hopefully, the time of least gustiness on our perch. The time came to prepare for the night.

We had four sleeping bags which were carried in the helicopters in case of such an emergency. We managed to build a shelter or small lean-to using the aluminum poles from the survey stations we carried and covered them with the cut-up rubber floats from the helicopters. It was not a class accommodation but quite acceptable for a one-night stand.⁴



Bears? What Bears?

L to R: Unknown, Sid Van Dyck, LCdr. B.F.(Bruce) Vibert

Photo Source: DND LAB 2472 Via LCdr. . L. Zbitnew Collection

² Larry ZBITNEW recalls: "One item of interest was that this mountain was one of the few without snow and we didn't have any water with us. I removed my water supply (ed before leaving the ship) and replaced it with a bottle of rum. Bruce (ed Lcdr.VIBERT) replaced his with a bottle of brandy (ed also before leaving the ship).

We did have box lunches with us which included orange juice but that was a bad mix for rum or brandy. To this day I won't drink any drink with orange juice as a mix."

³ Larry ZBITNEW recalls: "We were told to expect another drop of hot soup. What the ship's engineering officer did was purge a 5-gallon fire extinguisher and they put hot soup in this so it could be dropped on a fly by. A wrench was tapped to the side so we could open it. As the Hup flew over us they dropped the extinguisher. A good idea but when it hit the rocks on the mountain, it began to bounce all over the place. We all ducked for cover until the bomb came to a stop. The soup was the best I ever had, hot to."

⁴ Larry ZBITNEW recalls: "Brandy and rum gave us a nice sleep."

We called the LABRADOR at 0730 to report the winds had decreased. HUP 247, flown by Lt. Dave OLIPHANT got airborne and flew to the mountain top⁵. He hovered a few feet above the ground and the first two of us, the last ones to arrive, clambered aboard and were returned to the LABRADOR. Within half an hour he was back. The winds were starting to gust again but Lt. OLIPHANT was determined to rescue us. I will never forget his calm resolve and astute maneuvering to once again get into a hovering position so we could climb aboard. He succeeded and safely returned us to the ship by 0830.



Piasecki HUP-3, S/N 247 to the Rescue

Photo Source: DND Via Karl Gagnon Collection

"Once aboard LABRADOR we were handed over to the ship's doctor, Surgeon Lieutenant Commander D.A.(Don) MACIVER, who gave us a good debriefing and a medical check-up. He gave each of us a sleeping pill and told us to go to bed. I had never before taken a sleeping pill so had no idea how long it would take to knock me out. Being cautious, I got a glass of water, put it on the sink beside the bed, crawled under the blanket, took the pill with the water and quickly sat the glass back on the sink. I was tired and in about 15 minutes was sound asleep."

LABRADOR departed York Sound later in the morning enroute Frobisher Bay to disembark visitors and drop off mail.

Conclusion

In October 1957 an attempt was made to recover both helicopters. On Friday October 3rd, 1957 *Labrador* arrived at Peter Point in the late afternoon but due to the lateness of arrival and moderate winds it was not possible to fly that day. An American H-21 helicopter arrived onboard and the crew from this aircraft and one that had been forced down at Uyka Flats were given shelter for the night.

Early the following morning the H-21 cleared LABRADOR'S flight deck allowing the salvage operation to commence. Four helicopter detachment personnel under Petty Officer First Class J. Hughes were landed on Peter Point by LABRADOR'S helicopters to strip the two damaged aircraft for easy transfer to the ship in pieces. After two hours on the mountain top this work party had to be removed due to high winds which were making further salvage work dangerous. Both of LABRADOR'S helicopters were used to extract these men and experienced strong updraft to a height of five hundred feet in the process. With winds forecast to be high for the rest of the day, LABRADOR departed for Frobisher Bay and the following day departed for the trip home to Halifax as the forecast of high winds would have prevented further attempts to recover more of the two damaged aircraft.⁶

⁵ ZBITNEW recalled that: "the HUP was not totally serviceable but Dave OLIPHANT flew it anyway and we were happy to get back on board."

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L to R: “ Larry Zbitnew, Stu Dunbrack, Dave Oliphant, Sid Van Dyck, LCdr. B.F.(Bruce) Vibert

⁶ Helicopter Utility Squadron Twenty-one, Detachment Two monthly report, dated 18 October 1957 for the period 1 to 11 October 1957.



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From The President's Desk

A wise Nation preserves its records, gathers up its muniments, decorates the tombs of its illustrious dead, repairs its great public structures, and fosters national pride and love of country by perpetual references to the sacrifices and glories of the past.
Joseph Howe, 31 August, 1871

Hello to everyone out there in SAM Foundation Land. Our AGM was held as advertised on June the 15th. 50% attended in person and 50% Zoomed in. I am finding that is approximately the breakdown for most meetings these days: 50% Zoomers and 50% live and in person which I can work with all day.

The results were quite good in my judgement. We have an excellent Board composition this year to introduce you to. I stepped back as advertised and am now the VP, with the Presidents spot vacant for the time being. Anne Teasdale remains as Secretary, Peter Staley stays on as Treasurer, as does Karen McHarg remain in her position as Office Manager and Chief Cheerleader for SAMF and your point of contact for all things SAMF.

New to the Board are Robert (Bob) Stewart, Jason Miller, Mark Chapman, Eric Veillette and Rick Savage. Making up the rest of the board are returners John Webber, Ivor Axford, and Margaret Ferguson. Additionally, our 12 Wing Rep on the Board is LCol Bill Reyno, who is also on the Board of Trustees. This is a logical step as LCol Reyno is the Base Rep to the Formation in Halifax for the changes taking place across the entire Infrastructure spectrum. Our new Board has an excellent mix of experience, and I remain very optimistic about our future outcomes. Efforts will continue to identify someone to take my spot on the Board over the coming months, while I intend to remain on as VP for the time being. The way is clear for succession. To the five of you who stepped away from SAMF business, please accept my thanks for your inputs over your time on the SAMF Board. You were appreciated.

The meeting received more information from the Curator on the proposed changes to doing business, and if nothing else, I get the sense that this may prove to be a turn for the better. We can all be fooled by these things but at least it has the look and feel of something that could work to SAM's advantage. Time will tell.

FUTURE CONCERNS

My concerns have shifted to our membership numbers. We are now down to 420 members. This is down slightly over 1/2 of where it was when I took over this portfolio four short years ago. I think we are going to have to put on a full court press, to put some policies in place that we can only hope will work to our advantage. There is so much to see and do at SAM that those with kids, particularly those who reside in the Patch, are bound to benefit if there is something in place for them. A Flight Simulator, guided tours, our new Audio-visual presentation which will enhance the visitor experience greatly, and many more things wait for the visitor to see at SAM.

THE CHANGES THEY KEEP ON COMING

Me thinks there are huge seed changes taking shape in the world today which cannot be ignored. The Russian caper into the Ukraine is but one, with threats of opening up yet another front where our Canadian troops are currently located in Latvia. Add to this the fact that the Chinese have been rattling their swords at their Taiwanese cousins across the China Sea, which the Americans methinks are even more concerned about than their Russian counterparts. Any way these possible scenarios play out, the news is not likely to improve on these two fronts in the next 6-12 months.

Keep the faith, stay about your business, and watch for other aircraft. And if things get a tad ugly, come on out to SAM, take a walk through our collection, talk to us about anything you want, or take our audio-visual tour of SAM that will simply water your eyes. It is our mandate to present the success that Naval Aviation in Canada accomplished in a short 20-year life cycle, and to the RCAF which was handed a bunch of helicopters and people in 1968 and told to make it work. And make it work they certainly did.

From the waterfront in Eastern Passage, I remain.

John M. Cody
Vice President
SAM Foundation

Military Uniformity ... Or Not!

Leo Pettipas
Winnipeg, Manitoba

If there's one thing that characterizes any military organization, it's uniformity. Standardization, conformity, consistency across the board in outward presentation are the order of the day. It's why the personnel in our Armed Services wear uniforms.

Military uniformity is no accident; it's there for a purpose. However, there was a time in Canadian Naval Aviation history when this ideal was hard to come by, most notably in regard to paint schemes and markings worn by our operational aircraft. This difficulty was due in large part to a communication problem that existed between Canadians and Britons, and it had to be resolved if Canada's aircraft were to be visually distinguishable in the multi-national NATO wargames that characterised the decade of the 1950s and '60s. Specifically, the issue revolved around the use of a camouflage colour known as "Sky" which, in Britain, meant a pale green. In Canada, the word denoted a variation of light grey. On aircraft this was accompanied by a shade of dark grey known as "Extra Dark Sea Grey" (EDSG); in Canada, its equivalent was a dark grey and the two were all but indistinguishable.

The use of the term "Sky" is significant in this context. In and of itself, its meaning is non-committal -- it does not bring to mind a standard colour as do words like "red", "yellow," or "blue." Right from the get-go, the Canadians did not want their a/c painted Sky/green, and the incorporation of the word "Sky" into specifications with light grey in mind was, in effect, a misapplication and abuse of the term.



A Sea Fury in the 1948 RN "Pattern 1" camouflage scheme of EDSG/Sky. The latter covers the undersides of the fuselage, wings, and tailplanes. DND photo via Patrick Martin.



An 18th CAG Firefly FR I in 1948. She displays the RCN Dark Grey/Light Grey Pattern 2 camouflage scheme that was contemporaneous with the RN rigs shown in the previous picture. Jack McNulty photo.

But why was "Sky" entered in the Canadian specs in the first place when it was never the Canadians' intent to have their a/c painted pale green? The answer lies in the fact that the relevant Canadian specification document (Naval General Order [NGO] I 20) was based on an existing Royal Navy document, that being Admiralty Fleet Order 5286/46. The latter used the word Sky, and the term was simply transferred uncritically, without an explicit Canadian definition, to the NGO I 20 paper work. This adaptation did not pose a problem in this country, where "Sky" was consistently and everywhere interpreted and understood to mean "light grey." Unfortunately, the Canadians apparently neglected to inform the British airplane manufacturers of this detail, and so the 1950 batch of British-made Sea Furies all arrived in paint jobs that the RCN didn't want!

No Canadian operational aircraft received their initial paint jobs right from the get-go in Canada until 1956, when new aircraft (De Havilland Trackers) were actually manufactured right from scratch in this country for the first time. Before that, all Canadian-owned first-line a/c were acquired from foreign sources, and a goodly number of earlier RCN machines of British origin initially took to the air in distinctly non-Canadian Sky paint – thanks to the ambiguous and misleading NGO I 20. Accordingly, the Sea Furies taken on strength in 1948, and the additional Furies purchased in 1949 along with the Firefly AS 5s, were painted and, with one exception, marked in standard RN EDSG/Sky camouflage – this despite the fact that the Canadian two-tone grey combination had already been applied to Seafires and Fireflies in Canada since mid-1947 by the Canadian Car & Foundry contractor!

The RCN continued to receive what it didn't want from Old Blighty until 1951, when the authorities on this side of the Pond took the matter in hand once and for all. Three more batches of Sea Furies were scheduled to be delivered, and clearly something had to be done. In the spring of 1951, Chief Petty Officer John "Lucky" Knowles was, in his own words, "called into the Senior Engineer's office at Shearwater and handed me two paint chips – one a light grey, the other dark grey, the colours that comprised the Canadian a/c paint scheme. I and three mechanics were directed to proceed to the UK to accept twelve new Furies, and I was told to ensure that the aircraft conformed to these colours and the Canadian pattern. Not only were the results correct, but 'spot on' -- because I had the Canadian-colour paint chips right there in my pocket!"



One of the 1951 batch of Sea Furies with the correct Dark Grey/Light Grey Pattern 2 paint scheme. DND/RCN photo Via Patrick Martin.

So ended the war of the paint schemes.

But wait ... there's more to an airplane's outer appearance than its paint job: there are also its markings. On military aircraft, these typically include prominent letters, words, and numerals for identification and communication purposes, and are expressed in certain styles, or "fonts." In the 1950s RCN, the standard font was what we nowadays call "Calibri." This was the style that was called for in the official naval specifications and the one used by Fairey Aviation of Canada Ltd when marking the Navy's Avengers and Sea Furies.

1234567890 ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

The "Calibri" font of alpha-numeric as used after 1951 to officially mark the Navy's Avengers and Sea Furies. Courtesy of Patrick Martin.



Sea Furies displaying the Calibri markings font. DND/RCN photo via Patrick Martin.

But the Fairey Aviation Company of Canada plant wasn't the one that was marking the RCN's Sea Furies in the British factory – the Hawker-Siddeley factory was. And the marking font that Hawker-Siddeley used on the final (1953) batch of Furies was something now called "Eurostyle" which, like pale-green paint, wasn't what the RCN

1234567890 ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

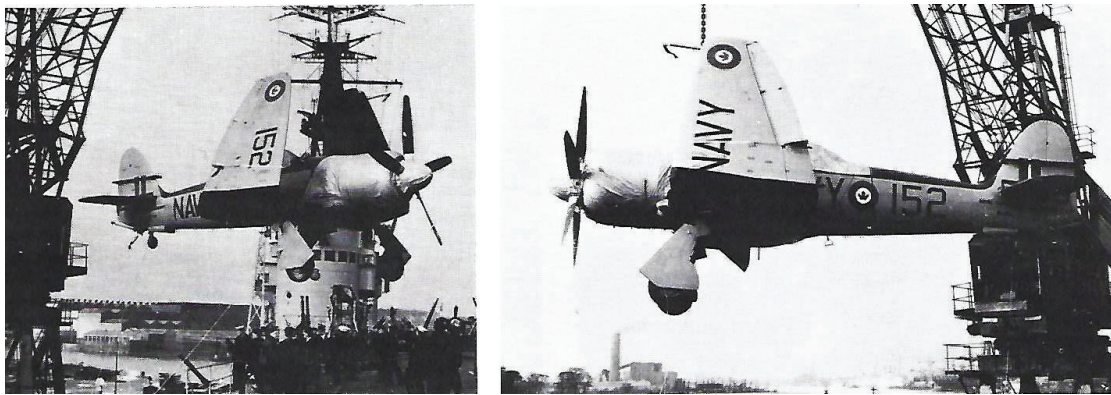
The "Eurostyle" font of alpha-nums that were misapplied to the last batch of Sea Furies in the UK in 1953.

Courtesy of Patrick Martin.

had in mind. Thus, while the 1953 paint scheme was correct, the marking string wasn't. This raises another question if we take into consideration the TBM Avengers that populated the Naval Air Arm in large numbers during the 1950s.



Two visiting Royal Navy Sea Furies with the Eurostyle font on full display. DND via Patrick Martin.



An RCN-owned Sea Fury with the non-regular Eurostyle markings font. DND photo via Patrick Martin.

And again, this spot of bother, like the NGO I 20 kerfuffle, was home-grown right here in Canada.

As far as I'm aware, all Avenger re-finishing and certain marking/re-marking procedures effected in Canada were carried out at the Fairey Aviation of Canada plant. Under these circumstances, we'd expect that the aircraft would consistently be turned out in uniform fashion. But the photographic record shows that the story is a bit more complicated than that.



Unusual Avenger showing full Eurostyle font in cowlings number, and aft number showing "3" in Calibri font and "6" in Eurostyle. DND photo via National Library and Archives Canada.

My theory is that the routine followed in marking the aircraft went as follows: In Canada there was a “division of labour” between the civilian factories and the Naval Air Section at *RCAF Station Dartmouth/HMCS Shearwater*; that is, factory personnel applied the paint along with those particular markings that would remain with each airframe throughout its tenure with the RCN. These comprised the roundels and fin-flashes; the large post-1951 NAVY identifiers on the fuselage and the underside of the starboard wing; and the ‘ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY’ legend + serial number on the aft fuselage adjacent to the tail planes.



It's difficult to believe that these two sets of markings were applied to this Seafire by technicians in the same workshop! Jack McNulty photo.

On the other hand, the application of squadron codes and identifiers, which potentially were subject to change during the plane's lifetime, were left to ground-crew personnel at the air station who seemingly didn't always go by the book. As the saying goes, “many's the slip 'tween the cup and the lip”; likewise, slips may have occurred 'tween the factory and the Maintenance Section on the base.



The odd-ball “4” in the radio call number on this Avenger suggests that it was applied on the base rather than at Fairey Aviation.
DND/RCN photo, via Paul E. Moore Collection.

A sizeable number of photographs illustrate aircraft of all types that are missing their radio call signs (“side-numbers”), which presumably bear out this state affairs. The missing elements in question, apparently, had not yet been applied at the air station when the photos were taken. The upshot was, different fonts not only showed up on different aircraft, but in some cases even on the same aircraft as well.



An Avenger presumed to be fresh out of overhaul at FAC but before the radio call number had been added by *Shearwater* technicians.
Jack McNulty photo.

And so, from the nit-picker's point of view, the Navy's quest for precision and uniformity in the physical appearance of its airplanes was frustrated right to the bitter end!

.....



WALL OF HONOUR

Guidelines for designing your “Wall of Honour” Tile.

The tile used is made from high quality marble which is 12 inches square. The tile can be sand blasted in various ways to suit your wishes. All lettering will be in upper case and the tile will be mounted in the diamond orientation as opposed to a square orientation. All Text will run horizontally across the tile.

The options are:

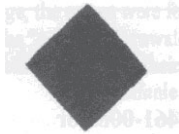
- Option A:** One half tile 12" X 12" x 17" and triangular in shape with up to 5 rows of 3/4" letters for a maximum of 60 letters and spaces. The longest row can accommodate up to 20 letters and spaces. The remaining 4 rows will decrease in length as the border/edge of the tile dictates. It should be noted that the upper half of the tile will start with a short row and the bottom half will start with a long row.
- Option B:** The full tile with up to 6 rows of 1" letters for a maximum of 55 letters and spaces. The two centre rows can accommodate up to 16 letters and spaces. The remaining rows will decrease as the edge of the tile dictates.
- Option C:** The full tile with up to 10 rows of 3/4" letters for a maximum of 120 letters and spaces. The two centre rows can accommodate 20 letters and spaces. The remaining rows will decrease as the edge of the tile dictates.
- Option D:** The “Buddy” Tile - sold only as a full tile. This tile is divided into 4 quarters - each 6" X 6". Each quarter can accommodate up to 6 rows of 1/2" letters for a maximum of 48 letters and spaces. The two centre rows can accommodate up to 12 letters and spaces with the remaining rows decreasing as the tile edge dictates.

Option A



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Option B & C



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(Wall Tiles (continued))

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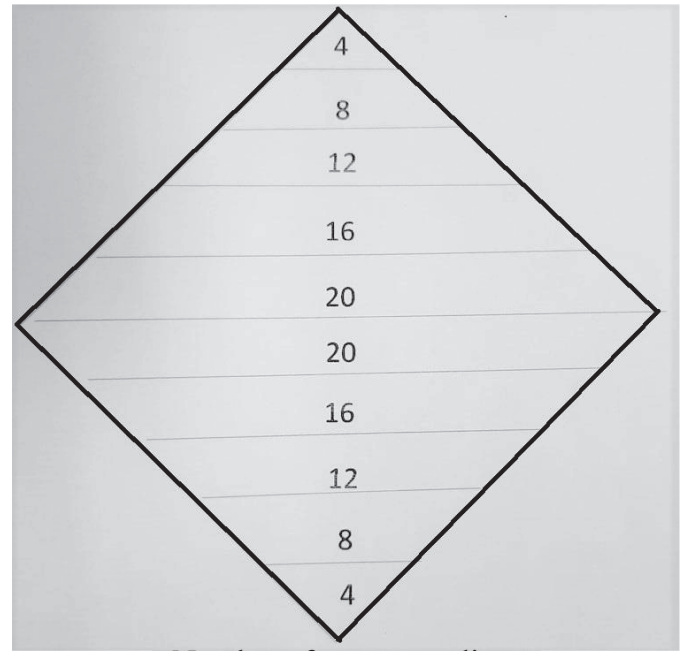
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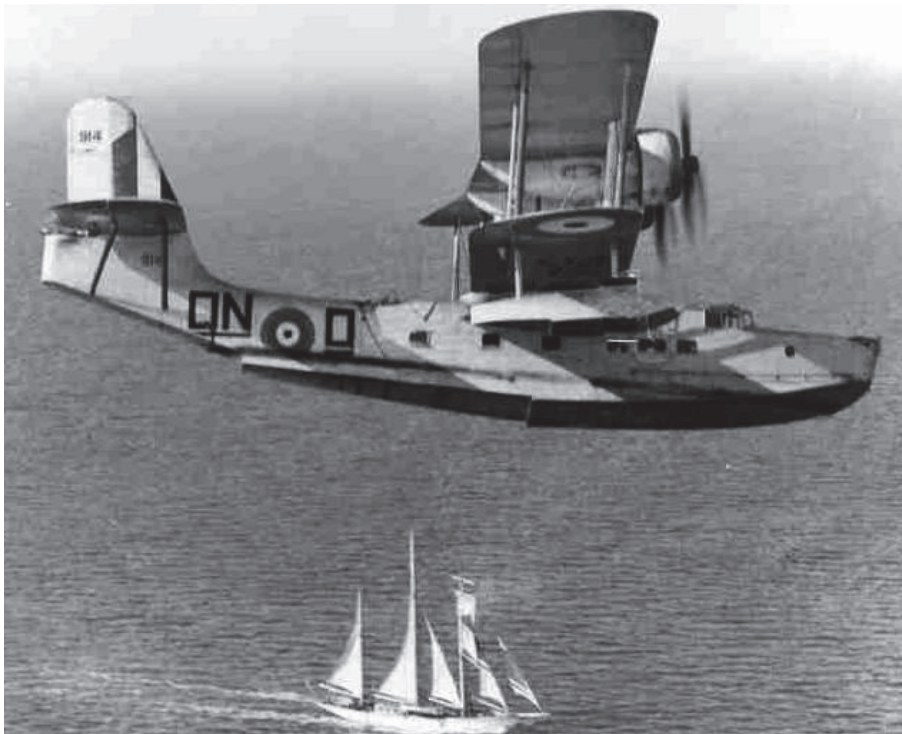


Supermarine Stranraer

The RCAF's Obsolescent Flying Boat That Could

Ernie Cable SAM Historian

Following England's declaration of war against Germany on 3 September 1939, Canada declared war a week later on 10 September. Although most RCAF squadrons were ill prepared to mobilize for war, No. 5 GR (General Reconnaissance) Squadron was better prepared than most and launched Canada's first operational sorties of the Second World War on the same day that Canada declared war. On 10 September, Canada's first sorties were tasked to search for German vessels south of Nova Scotia in the approaches to Halifax harbour. These first sorties were flown from the seaplane base at RCAF Station Dartmouth by three Supermarine Stranraer flying boats delivered to the RCAF only nine months earlier.



No. 5 (GR) Sqn Stranraer QN-O from RCAF Dartmouth on patrol

British Supermarine and the Stranraer

The original Stranraers were built by the Supermarine Company at Southampton, England which had a proud tradition of designing and producing British sea-going aircraft, especially high-speed seaplanes. In 1922, Supermarine entered the annual international Snyder Trophy race for sea planes and flying boats and won the coveted trophy with the Supermarine Sea Lion flying boat with an average speed of 146 mph (243 km/h). The competition was intended to encourage technical advances in civil aviation but became a contest for pure speed over a 350 km triangular course. The trophy's sponsor, the Federation Aeronautique

Internationale, granted that any nation winning the trophy three times in a five-year span would permanently retain the trophy. Following victories in 1927, 1929 and 1931 with the Supermarine S.6B the British team won the Snyder Trophy outright. During the 1931 race the S.6B also set a world's speed record of 380 mph (610 km/h). The trophy is on permanent display at the Science Museum in London, England.

In November 1928, Vickers Aviation, Ltd. took control of Supermarine, and the new company was renamed Vickers Supermarine. In 1933, Vickers Supermarine introduced the "Seagull", a single-engine, amphibian flying boat with a metal hull. The Seagull, renamed the "Walrus", was acquired by the Royal Navy as a reconnaissance, fleet spotter aircraft capable of being catapulted from the navy's battleships and cruisers or employed ashore for training, communications, and air-sea rescue duties. During the Second World War the Royal Navy positioned a number of Walrus flying boats at RCAF Station Dartmouth to replace aircraft damaged by heavy seas on their exposed catapults or otherwise unserviceable while embarked on the capital ships calling at Halifax.

Also, in 1933, Supermarine was developing its second twin-engine flying boat. The Supermarine Stranraer was the final evolution of the very successful Supermarine Southampton, which debuted in March 1925 and went on to have a stellar flying career with the Royal Air Force (RAF) and civilian airlines. The Stranraer was developed to Air Ministry Specification R.24/31 for a maritime coastal patrol aircraft for the RAF. In 1933, Supermarine was awarded a contract for a single prototype, which was the last flying boat constructed with biplane wings. The Stranraer was also the last flying boat designed by R.J. Mitchell who was better known as the designer of the famous Supermarine Spitfire. Following the British tradition of naming flying boats after coastal towns or ports, Supermarine's latest flying boat was named "Stranraer" after a coastal town in southwest Scotland on the shores of Loch Ryan.

Supermarine designed the Stranraer as a twin-engine, biplane with wings mounted on top of a long fuselage with a boat-like hull for operating from water anchorages. The fuselage was constructed of metal while wings and control surfaces were covered with fabric, typical of aircraft of the time, and just prior to the increased use of all-metal skinned aircraft before the Second World War. Pontoons were suspended under the outer section of each lower wing to stabilize the aircraft while manoeuvring on the water. Perspex windows completely enclosed the cockpit with side-by-side seating for two pilots; five windows were built into each side of the fuselage for crewmember workstations in the cabin. The empennage was capped by a single horizontal tail plane supporting a pair of vertical tail fins. The Stranraer was armed with three Lewis machine guns mounted in three open-air turrets; one in the bow forward of the cockpit; the second, a dorsal position at the fuselage midships aft of the wings; and the third, a tail position between the two vertical tail fins. Up to 1,000 pounds (450 kg) of bombs, naval mines or depth charges could be carried under the wings for engaging maritime targets. The production version was powered by a pair of 920 horsepower Bristol Pegasus X radial engines embedded in the leading edge of the upper wing.

Following the flight-test program, the Stranraer prototype was delivered to the RAF on 24 October 1934. On 29 August 1935, an initial order was placed for 17 aircraft. The production version first flew in December 1936, entering service operations in April 1937; the last Stranraer

was delivered to the RAF in April 1939. An additional order for six aircraft was placed in May 1936 but was subsequently cancelled because of the Stranraer's marginal performance. Due to its less than favourable reception, the Stranraer gained several derisive nicknames. It was sometimes referred to as the "Whistling Shithouse" because the toilet opened directly to the slip stream and when the toilet seat was lifted, the airflow caused the toilet to whistle. In more genteel company it was nicknamed the "Whistling Birdcage" because of the whistling of the slipstream through the many wires bracing the upper and lower wings.

Stranraers For Canada

The RCAF was organized similarly to the RAF, therefore RAF aircraft fit into the Canadian scheme better than American aircraft because the structure of a RAF squadron was designed to meet the requirements of the type of aircraft flown by the squadron. Air Commodore G.M. Croil, the Royal Canadian Air Force's (RCAF) senior officer, believed that since the RCAF used the same structure as the RAF, then using the same equipment could achieve the best results for the RCAF. But purchasing British aircraft would place the RCAF in competition with the RAF for the same scarce resources. The alternative of changing to American aircraft would require a change to squadron structure, which would result in a certain amount of experimentation to operate effectively. Similarly, changing to American aircraft would require a change to the source of supply of guns, bombs, instruments, and tools of all kinds because American aircraft were designed to accept only American accessories. Moreover, information about American designs was kept classified until the aircraft went into production, limiting the RCAF to aircraft which were at least a year old and possibly not the best choice for the RCAF. Also, if the United States decided to remain neutral in the looming war, neutrality legislation would prohibit export to Canada. Air Commodore Croil believed that it was necessary to continue with British aircraft as there was no other proven supplier, and the aircraft could be purchased through the RAF from markets that would otherwise be closed to Canada. Additionally, RAF experience with potential types of aircraft would be a useful proving ground. Therefore, Croil advised the Canadian government that the RCAF had little choice other than buying British designed and tested aircraft while trying to arrange their construction in Canada under licence.

As early as 1933, the Canadian Parliament recognised that the RCAF needed to be properly equipped with modern aircraft capable of defending the country. But the great depression deferred the acquisition of aircraft and personnel and the RCAF had to make do with a small number of obsolete aircraft. In 1935, as the economic situation improved the House of Commons proposed budget increases for all three services with the largest share allotted to the RCAF. Aircraft were considered essential to modern warfare and their speed enabled them to be moved to defend any part of Canada within hours. Although vast oceans geographically isolated Canada from the deteriorating political situations in Europe and Japan, Parliament was concerned about protection of the Pacific gateways to Canada and the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, the seaway to the strategic trading ports at Quebec City and Montreal. Since Canada was more likely to be attacked from the sea than air or land, the government believed aircraft capable of protecting its coasts should take priority over fighters or bombers. But where were the aircraft to come from?

In July 1936, Canadian Prime Minister W.L. King organized a Cabinet Defence Committee, which unanimously reaffirmed that the RCAF's obsolete aircraft needed to be upgraded and increased funding was required to make the RCAF Canada's first line of defence. The 1936 defence estimates proposed increasing the RCAF's budget to \$4,685,028, primarily for flying boats and torpedo bombers. Although, the Liberal government under Prime Minister King had not yet committed to fighting alongside Great Britain in the event of war, 16 Liberal Members of Parliament (MPs) from Quebec rejected the new defence budget because they did not want any French-Canadian money spent in defence of Great Britain. They believed that all the money must be spent exclusively for the defence of Canada. This caused heated debate in the Quebec press and inflamed the rhetoric among Quebec isolationists. King had to maintain a delicate balance between his own Quebec MPs, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party and the rest of English-speaking Canada. King felt obligated to purchase British aircraft because he found it humiliating to accept protection from Britain without sharing in the costs. (As a British Dominion Canada depended on Britain for defence.) The solution to the political divide was to adopt Air Commodore Croil's recommendation to build British aircraft under license in Canada, at Montreal, Quebec. The proposal was approved by the Canadian Cabinet, satisfying most of the Liberal MPs from Quebec. Now French-Canadian tax money was being spent to produce RCAF aircraft built in Montreal, giving jobs to French-Canadians. King also hoped by awarding aircraft contracts to Montreal, the manufacturers would gain experience in producing aircraft on a large-scale, which in the event of war, would possibly help unite Quebec with the rest of Canada.

Following the creation of an aircraft acquisition policy, the Canadian Government next had to decide which British aircraft best suited Canadian flying conditions and locations in Canada. Normally, the decision to select aircraft to meet RCAF requirements would have been left to air force experts. However, the government asked the British Air Ministry to recommend a reliable and effective aircraft, even though they had no knowledge of Canadian weather or flying conditions. The final decision was taken out of the RCAF's hands when Prime Minister King, under a cloud of secrecy, created two special interdepartmental committees to review the new rearmament policy and to ensure that acquisition of new aircraft for the RCAF was conducted without speculation or excessive profits. As a result of the interdepartmental committees' deliberations Canada obtained the license to build the British Vickers Supermarine Stranraer in Montreal, Quebec.

The immediate government priority was to equip and train nine RCAF squadrons for the protection of Canada's two large coastlines. In November 1936, the first five Stranraer flying boats were ordered from Canadian Vickers Ltd. in Montreal at a cost \$28,000 per aircraft. Their range of 1,000 miles (1,600 km) gave them an operating radius of 250 miles (420 km), capable of meeting Canada's long-range coastal reconnaissance needs¹. The fuselage accommodated sleeping quarters which allowed the crew of six or seven to take full advantage of its 10-hour endurance at a cruising speed of 105 mph (175 km/h). The first two Canadian built Stranraer flying boats, serial numbers 907 and 908, were delivered to No.5 (GR) at Dartmouth, Nova Scotia in November and December 1938. The three remaining Stranraers from the first order of

¹ Allowing a safety margin for headwinds, weight of armament and equipment, number of crew and adverse weather could significantly reduce operational ranges.

five, serial numbers 909, 910 and 911, (Serial numbers 900 -906 were not assigned to Stranraers.) were delivered to No.5 (GR) Squadron in May and June 1939.

When a major increase in the 1937-38 Parliamentary budget permitted a more lavish expenditure on new aircraft, seven more Stranraers were ordered. Stranraer 912 was flown to Vancouver in July 1939 to start the build-up of Pacific coast squadrons; Stranraers 913 and 914 were delivered to RCAF Dartmouth in September 1939. In October and November three more Stranraers, 918 – 920 were delivered to the RCAF and in January 1941, a further contract was awarded for 12 more aircraft with delivery set for September 1941. The RCAF eventually took delivery of 40 Canadian-built Stranraers which served in anti-submarine and coastal defence squadrons on both Canada's Atlantic and Pacific coasts and remained in service until 1946.



Crewman prepares to secure Stranraer to mooring buoy at RCAF Bella Bella BC

RCAF Stranraer Operations

As the Stranraers came off the production line in Montreal, Vickers Supermarine depended on the RCAF to install the government furnished High Frequency radios in each aircraft before being delivered to RCAF Station Dartmouth. The 1082 High Frequency receiver and the 1083 High Frequency transmitter were supplied by the British to the RCAF for the Stranraers' long-range communications. Sergeant Art Robinson a commercial radio operator before enlisting in the RCAF in 1938, was No.5 (GR)'s most experienced wireless operator and was the obvious choice to travel to Montreal to install the radios.² After successful ground testing the radios were air tested during the delivery flight to Dartmouth. The first Stranraer was

² Sergeant Robinson is the author's Father-in-Law. He later served as a wireless operator on Lockheed Hudsons with 413 and 11 Squadrons. He retired from the RCAF as a Squadron Leader telecommunications officer in 1965.

delivered to Rockcliffe in early November 1938 and subsequently ferried by Squadron Leader (S/L) Mawdesley³ and crew to No.5 (GR) at Dartmouth. Sergeant Robinson accumulated many flying hours in various aircraft, but in his view, there was nothing like the Stranraer. “The wires bracing the wing struts would sing in the slipstream and the aircraft yaw side to side was particularly pronounced in the tail of the aircraft. You could hear the bilge water sloshing in the hull while in the air.”

Flying Officer (F/O) L.J. Birchall who had recently been awarded his pilot’s wings recorded that as a young Flying Officer, he was posted from the Air Navigation and Seaplane School in Trenton, ON to RCAF Station Dartmouth where No.5 (GR) Squadron was in the process of equipping with Stranraer flying boats.⁴ S/L Mawdesley was the squadron’s chief instructor who taught new pilots the basics of General Reconnaissance (coastal patrol) operations as well as the techniques of flying the Stranraer by day and night.⁵ Birchall’s first flight on 4 March 1939 taught landings and take-offs, handling on the water, and just generally getting used to the aircraft. For night flying the water landing path was marked by three big cork floats with eight-foot (2.8 meter) poles mounted on them. A battery in the cork float lighted a lamp on the float and another at the top of the pole. The floats were anchored aligned with the direction of the wind at set distances apart. In preparation for landing the pilot lined up parallel to the floats marking the landing area using the lights on the floats as a guide. As the pilot descended, he watched the lights on the top of the poles and when they were in a line and all at the same height, he knew he was correctly into wind and exactly eight feet above the water. The pilot then closed the throttles and settled the aircraft on the water.

In preparation for night flying Birchall wrote that he and his fellow student pilots were given floats to practice setting them up and putting them out to anchor. Next, they practiced landing beside the floats in daytime to visually observe the orientation of the floats with the water surface during the landing. Then they practiced flying beside the floats in reduced visibility during twilight until S/L Mawdesley considered them ready for night landings. The first night flight occurred on 29 March 1939 when Birchall and his fellow student pilots took off and S/L Mawdesley checked everyone out with each pilot taking turns at the controls until all had completed the required number of landings to qualify.

Sergeant Robinson while serving as a wireless operator crewmember on No.5 (GR) recalled some of his experiences while flying on the Stranraer. “On the water the Stranraer’s high freeboard and tall twin tails made it especially prone to being carried by the wind. As the wireless operator, one of my jobs was to throw drogues, shaped like windsocks, over the side of the aircraft to help the pilot steer the aircraft on the water. I would open the mid-upper Lewis-gun hatch just behind the wing and throw out a drogue on the left or right side on the pilot’s

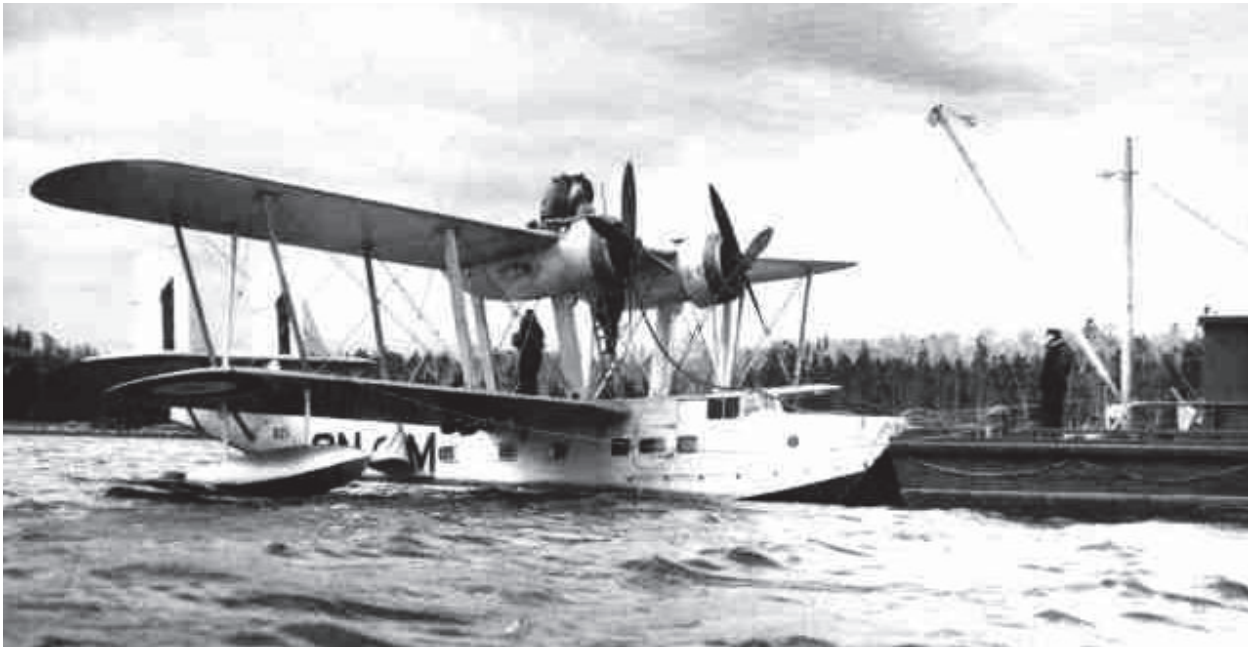
³ Squadron Leader Mawdesley joined the Canadian Air Force in January 1921. Mawdesley Hall, home of the Air Navigation School in Winnipeg is named after Mawdesley. He retired from the RCAF as a Group Captain in July 1945 and passed away in May 1968.

⁴ Flying Officer Birchall had recently completed pilot training at Camp Borden before being posted to the Air Navigation and Seaplane School. He later served on RCAF 413 Squadron in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) where he became known as the Saviour of Ceylon for sighting the approaching Japanese Fleet and saving Ceylon from invasion. He retired from the RCAF in 1967 as an Air Commodore and passed away in 2004 at the age of 89.

⁵ S/L Mawdesley attended the RAF Air Navigation School in 1927 and served on RAF 210 Squadron flying Supermarine Southampton flying boats from 1933 to 1935.

signal. The drogue, tethered to the aircraft by a line, caused the aircraft to turn. Pulling them out of the water was a real struggle and near impossible if the aircraft was taxiing at any speed. As the pilot neared the mooring buoy the flight engineer would open the nose Lewis-gun hatch and secure the bow of the aircraft to the buoy just like a boat.”

When King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (Queen Mother) visited Canada in May and June 1939, three Stranraers from No.5 (GR) Squadron met the *RMS Empress of Britain* when it entered Canadian waters and escorted it up the St. Lawrence River to Quebec City. Sergeant Robinson wrote that, “The highlight of my Stranraer flying was when we were one of three crews selected to escort the royal yacht as it sailed from Halifax to Charlottetown. Our flight to Charlottetown was uneventful and we landed in Charlottetown harbour. The tide was out, and we had to use the drogues to steer the aircraft. With one drogue out the wind whipped the aircraft around over the drogue line and the drogue wound up on the opposite side of the aircraft and we got stuck in the mud. After much manoeuvring and cursing we managed to free ourselves and found a safe anchorage in the harbour. I was left on board to look after the aircraft while the rest of the crew went ashore to attend the royal welcoming ceremonies in Charlottetown. On our last day in Charlottetown the King and Queen requested to meet the crew of one of the flying boats; we had been living on the aircraft in our uniforms for four days and our buttons and shoes needed polishing. Minutes later they were on the dock and our crew was presented to them. The King was gallant, and the Queen was radiant; but the lack of spit and polish didn’t seem to bother them.”



No.5 (GR) Sqn Stranraer refuelling from barge on Eastern Passage at RCAF Dartmouth

Preparation for War

In 1938, as war clouds were looming on the horizon National Defence Headquarters created the Joint Staff Committee which defined the broad roles of the army, navy, and air force. The Committee subdivided Canada's coastlines into zones for operational purposes and set objectives for the three armed forces. In broad terms the air force was to cooperate with naval forces in seaward defence and the protection of shipping. As part of the wartime restructuring the RCAF gained independence from the army's regional command structure and established its own regional commands. Western Air Command, established on 1 March 1938, was responsible for defence of the Pacific coast and the western provinces, while Eastern Air Command, established on 15 September, was responsible for the Atlantic coast and the Maritime provinces. The Munich Crisis in September 1938 shifted the focus from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast and brought a relocation of squadrons to the Maritimes.

Eastern Air Command's area of responsibility was immense – from eastern Quebec to the seas east of Newfoundland. With no obvious routes for enemy ships and submarines, Eastern Air Command subdivided its area of responsibility into four air reconnaissance areas, named Yarmouth, Halifax, Sydney and Gaspé after the major coastal communities in each area, to guard against shore bombardment by ships and naval aircraft (which by 1939 seemed to be the most serious threat) and attacks on shipping and shore targets by submarines. A main aircraft base was planned for each area, but only the Dartmouth seaplane station was ready, and only its long-time resident squadron, No.5 (GR) was fully operational. No.5 (GR), under the command of S/L A.D. Ross, started prewar precautionary patrols with its Stranraers on 2 September and continued them daily until war was declared.⁶

War Declared

The Second World War began in the early dawn of 1 September 1939, when German armies swept across the border into Poland. Great Britain and France declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, and on the same day the German submarine U-30 sank the *S.S. Athenia*, the first British liner to be sunk with a loss of 117 lives, northwest of Ireland. This prompted the British Admiralty to implement prewar plans to sail north Atlantic shipping in defended convoys. Also, on 3 September 1939, Eastern Air Command promulgated Operational Order No.4 containing 41 pages of maps and detailed information with secret prewar orders. On 10 September 1939, Canada supported Britain and France by declaring war against Germany. The Royal Navy stationed major warships at Halifax, the convoys' western terminus, to sail as escorts against German surface raiders, while the Royal Canadian Navy's tiny fleet provided anti-submarine escorts in the focal areas off Nova Scotia. RCAF Stranraers flew patrols around the convoys to locate enemy vessels and assist the surface escorts in countering them.

Flying Officer L.J. Birchall had only recently arrived at RCAF Station Dartmouth as a pilot on No. 5 (GR) Squadron and remembers the first day of the war. "I was captain of Stranraer No. 907 and had been out on patrol on 9 September 1939. We returned (to the Dartmouth

⁶ S/L Ross joined the RCAF in 1928 as a pilot. He commanded No. 62 Base in No.6 Group RCAF in RAF Bomber Command and was awarded the George Cross for bravery in 1944. He was also the Air Commander for the Canadian Western Atlantic NATO Sub-area before retiring from the RCAF as an Air Commodore in 1961. Dwight Ross school in Greenwood is named after him.

seaplane station at Eastern Passage), refueled and turned over to another crew who did some night flying. Early morning 10 September, we were out again to our aircraft. All seemed well so we started up, did our taxi and engine tests, came back to our mooring (in Eastern Passage), topped our tanks and signaled we were on standby. We had food on board and so prepared a meal. A dingy came out with the appropriate cards for our coding machine (for encrypting radio messages) and also sealed Top Secret orders, which we locked up in our dispatch case. Everything seemed to be back to normal.



Preparing lunch in Stranraer galley. CFJIC DND PHOTO PL-9608

Suddenly all hell broke loose! People started running to the dock and the masthead light on the pier was blinking like crazy. All aircraft acknowledged by aldis (signal) lamp and then came the message “War Declared”.⁷ We started engines, cast off from the mooring and taxied to warm the engines. A message detailed us to go to a specific lighthouse up the northeast coast, open our sealed orders (A parallel track search south of Nova Scotia between Halifax and Canso.) and carry them out.”

Flight Lieutenant (F/L) Price and crew of five in Stranraer No. 908 was the first aircraft to take off from Eastern Passage. RCAF Station Dartmouth and No.5 (GR) Squadron had the distinction of launching Canada's first operational wartime mission on 10 September 1939. Because of the strategic importance of Halifax’s harbour, F/L Price in Stranraer No. 908 was tasked to conduct a parallel track search off the Halifax approaches.

Birchall and crew took off minutes later and went up the coast as directed.

⁷ The flashing masthead light was in response to a Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) wireless telegraphy message at 1634 hours GMT, 1234 hours (Atlantic Standard time AST) to mobilize for war. The No.5 Squadron Operations Record Book indicates that F/L Price was airborne in Stranraer 908 at 1520 hours AST, F/L Twigg was airborne in Stranraer 910 at 1420 hours AST and F/O Birchall was airborne in Stranraer 907 at 1440 hours AST.

“Our orders were to do a long-range patrol out over a shipping lane into Halifax, identify all shipping, record time, position, course and speed. We were to remain on patrol as long as fuel permitted. We mounted our Lewis guns fore and aft, checked all our depth charge circuits and set out from the lighthouse as ordered.

Our patrols were supposed to be flown about 2,000 to 3,000 feet (300 to 700 meters) above the water but usually we were down much lower due to fog, low cloud and in the winter because of snow squalls. The Stranraer had no de-icing equipment whatsoever and so we had to be extremely careful to avoid icing conditions at all costs. We carried out our patrol and returned to Dartmouth with a bare minimum of fuel. After we picked up a mooring, a fresh crew came aboard to refuel etc. and go on standby. We were taken ashore at once, debriefed, fed, watered and off to bed for rest. Our post flight reports were sent by secure landline to Eastern Air Command Headquarters in Halifax where they were coordinated with the Navy. (F/L Price and crew reported sighting five friendly vessels but no enemy activity in their post flight report. Similarly, Birchall’s crew reported sighting three friendly vessels and no enemy.) Based on all the Navy plots etc. we would be briefed on friendly shipping prior to take-off on our next patrol.

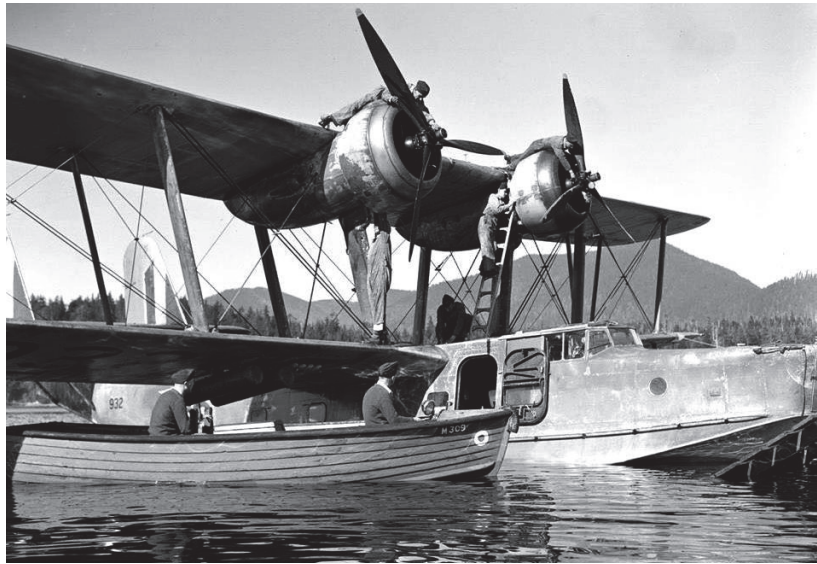
So started the war for us at No. 5 (GR) Squadron, the first RCAF squadron to fly a wartime mission in the Second World War’s Battle of the Atlantic”.

When the first HX (Halifax to United Kingdom) convoy put to sea on 16 September 1939, a pattern for the future was established. Stranraers conducted harbour exit patrols off Halifax prior to a convoy's departure to ensure the Halifax approaches were clear of lurking submarines as experienced during the First World War. But most of the Stranraers tasking was dedicated to providing anti-submarine patrols for outbound and inbound convoys to the seaward limit of their operational radius, approximately 250 miles (415 km). The patrols were flown from dawn to dusk with the Stranraers typically taking-off from their Dartmouth moorings at 0530 hours to rendezvous with their assigned convoys then returning to Dartmouth approximately five hours later at the limit of their endurance. To extend their search area farther seaward the Stranraers frequently landed on Wallace Lake on Sable Island, 180 miles (300 km) southeast of Dartmouth, around mid-day to refuel, then by late afternoon took-off from Sable Island to either rejoin a convoy or conduct independent anti-submarine searches before landing back at RCAF Station Dartmouth as late as midnight.

By the end of September 1939, the RCAF’s Home War Establishment squadrons (Based in Canada to defend home territory) underwent a change in designation. The “GR” (General Reconnaissance) nomenclature borrowed from the RAF was replaced with “BR” (Bomber Reconnaissance), a broader and uniquely Canadian designation which more accurately described the various tasks carried out by the RCAF’s maritime squadrons.

A Wavering Beginning

Although Eastern Air Command’s Operation Order No.4 appeared sound on paper, putting the plan into practice took time, and since the RCAF had no mentors experienced in maritime operations to pass on proven techniques, No.5 (BR) crews had to learn through trial and error. Very early in the war it became apparent that No.5 (BR) was not prepared for anti-submarine patrols. With visual search as the only means to detect submarines, the Stranraers



Maintenance crew work on moored Stranraer's engines at RCAF Bella Bella BC

could only provide air surveillance. Historians, with the advantage of hindsight acknowledged the crews' lack of anti-submarine training and considered these early convoy escort duties as "Scare-Crow" patrols which, at best, could frighten submarines away from the convoy when an aircraft was sighted. If a submarine were sighted the Stranraers' greatest value would be alerting the surface escorts to the submarine's location for subsequent attack. Early in the war, seriously under manned ground crews, with only 63 of an established 139 airmen on strength, placed rigorous demands on squadron's ability to maintain their outdated but sturdy dependable Stranraers. Pilots, with only 17 of an established strength of 23, were inexperienced in maritime flying and had to hone their skills of navigating over a featureless ocean while coping with the challenges of maritime reconnaissance in unpredictable and often abominable Atlantic weather. No.5 (BR)'s Operational Readiness Book for 17 September 1939 records some of the squadron's early failings while escorting HX-1, the first convoy sailing from Halifax to England. (The HX abbreviation was assigned to convoys sailing from Halifax to England.)

- Stranraer 908 returns to base cannot find Sable Island.
- Stranraer 910 returns to base cannot find convoy.
- Stranraer 914 gets lost, 114 miles from Sable Island, 40 miles off track.
- Stranraer 911 gets lost, runs out of fuel, force lands on ocean, flying boat sinks during recovery attempts.

The saga of Stranraer 911 is recorded in the annals RCAF history. S/L Mair and crew of seven was tasked to rendezvous with a convoy, then after being relieved by a second Stranraer land on Sable Island to refuel. After refuelling S/L Mair was to relieve the second Stranraer and continue the patrol around the convoy, with a planned return to Dartmouth around 2345 hours. In very hazy weather the convoy could not be located at the rendezvous point and after a two-hour square search with no sight of the convoy S/L Mair headed for Sable Island. However, when Sable Island could not be located, he headed for the nearest point of Nova Scotia. Eventually, the crew recognized two points of land, Cape Ray, Newfoundland and Cape North on Nova Scotia's

Cape Breton Island. Confident of his position, S/L Mair altered course to the seaplane base at Sydney on Cape Breton Island. However, because the aircraft was low on fuel it was becoming increasingly clear that the aircraft would be forced to land on the open sea before reaching the Cape Breton coast. Attempts to jettison the bomb load to lighten the aircraft failed and neither the navigator (co-pilot performed as navigator) or Corporal (Cpl) Calow, the wireless operator, were able to raise a response to their calls for help. Shortly thereafter the engines began to sputter because of fuel starvation and S/L Mair was forced to land on the sea at 1255 hours, 7 hours 35 minutes after taking off from Dartmouth. Drogues were streamed from the aircraft to reduce drift away from its reported position. A message requesting help and the estimated position was released with one of the carrier pigeons. The life raft was inflated and tied to the upper fuselage as precaution in case of being swamped in the heavy seas; the crew took turns, in pairs, standing watch. The wireless operator continued to send out calls for help, but due to static, no reply was received until 2330 hours, when contact with Dartmouth was finally established.

At 0705 hours, a Delta floatplane (from Sydney) was sighted about five miles to port. Cpl Calow transmitted the sighting to Sydney while an attempt was made to attract the pilot's attention with the aldis lamp. But, to no avail. At 0720 hours, heavy seas damaged the port aileron and snapped the line attached to last drogue, which was replaced by an empty flare box tied to a rope. To further stem the drift a bailing bucket, attached to a rope, was streamed from the bow as another makeshift drogue.

At about 1000 hours, a tanker was sighted about five miles to starboard. Attempts to attract the ship's attention by flares and aldis lamp failed. Cpl Calow reported to Sydney that they could see the tanker and gave their relative position from the tanker. He then heard Sydney telling the tanker their location, and shortly thereafter the tanker altered course in their direction. Observing that the tanker was of Swedish registry, the crew weighted all secret documents and threw them overboard (Sweden was a neutral country not privy to allied documents). The tanker's lifeboat came as close as possible but indicated that it could not come alongside in the 25 to 35-foot (7-9 meter) seas. The crew jumped in the water and with the aid of their lifejackets swam to the lifeboat.

The crew spent the remainder of the day on the tanker while waiting for a tug to arrive to tow the Stranraer ashore. However, the sea was too rough to salvage the aircraft or transfer the crew to the tug. The tanker followed the tug to the lee of Scatari Island where calmer water allowed the crew to transfer to the tug, which delivered them to the fishing village at Louisburg on Cape Breton Island. The crew then took a taxi to Sydney where they remained until the next day when they learned that their Stranraer had sunk while under tow. The crew returned to Dartmouth by train.

Cpl Calow stuck to his radio equipment and was unceasing in his efforts to contact home base and DF stations in the area. During the 22 hours adrift at sea, he suffered from seasickness, exposure and cold. For his devotion to duty Cpl Calow was awarded the British Empire Medal.

Success at Last

To ensure that no convoy sailed again without RCAF air protection as occurred with convoy HX-1, S/L Ross implemented many changes to the squadron's navigation procedures. A

new navigation log was created to record the time of all navigation events including changes of course, and co-pilot navigators had to submit a "Track Chart", a plot of the aircraft's track, after each flight. By November 1939, No.5 (BR)'s navigation greatly improved, successfully escorting convoys HX-7, 8, 9, and 10, totaling 117 ships, to the outer limits of the Stranraers' endurance. The squadron also completed three special constant protection patrols where the Stranraers were tasked to rendezvous with high value British warships at sea and remain overhead until the ships docked at Halifax. These special patrols provided protection for ships that were renowned during the Second World War and included *HMS Furious* (aircraft carrier) and *HMS Repulse* (battleship) on 3 November, *HMS Alaunia* (armed merchant cruiser) on 7 November, and *HMS Warspite* (battleship) and *HMS Effingham* (heavy cruiser) on 14 November. On 10 December 1939, No.5 (BR) Stranraers were tasked to escort the first Canadian Troop Ship convoy carrying 12,543 troops of the First Canadian Infantry Division to England. The convoy consisted of the converted passenger liners, *Aquitania*, *Empress of Britain*, *Duchess of Bedford*, *Monarch of Bermuda*, and *Empress of Australia* accompanied by the aircraft carrier *HMS Furious*, four Royal Navy warships and four Royal Canadian Navy destroyers.

For the next twelve months, No.5 Squadron Stranraers often deployed to Sydney and Gaspé, Quebec to conduct anti-submarine patrols in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and to escort UK bound convoys departing from Sydney. Following Canada's declaration of war against Italy on 10 June 1940, F/L Birchall was tasked with locating any Italian vessels still in Canadian waters. Flying from the seaplane station at Gaspé, he located the Italian merchant ship *Capo Nola*, which had recently departed from Quebec, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Having been informed of the declaration of war by radio, Birchall made a low pass over the freighter as if making an attack. This panicked the captain into running his vessel aground on a sandbank. Birchall then landed his Stranraer on the water near the *Capo Nola* and waited until Royal Canadian Navy vessels arrived on scene. The *Capo Nola's* crew were the first Italians taken prisoner by the Allies during the Second World War.

In the summer of 1940, the German U-boat campaign started moving from the western approaches of the UK into the western Atlantic. The pending threat to convoys departing from Canada added urgency the RCAF's requirement to replace its collection of pre-war aircraft cobbled together for coastal reconnaissance. The RCAF pleaded with American and British governments for a higher priority for its orders for long-range maritime patrol aircraft. However, because of competing wartime exigencies No.5 (BR) had to wait until June 1941 before Canso aircraft started to arrive to replace its Stranraers. It was very fortunate for Eastern Air Command that the Kriegsmarine's (German navy) U-boats and heavily armed surface raiders did not venture into the western Atlantic until September 1941 because No.5 Squadron's obsolescent Stranraers and air crews inexperienced in naval warfare would have been overwhelmed by the vastly superior German naval forces. Since German naval forces did not appear off the east coast of Canada until September 1941, No.5 Squadron's Stranraers never encountered enemy U-boats or surface combatants and its crews were never tested against a hostile enemy.

Although No.5 Squadron Stranraers never came across enemy forces, they played a fundamental role in the RCAF's Eastern Air Command maturing from an air surveillance neophyte to a credible maritime reconnaissance force. Following the fleeting success of flying the RCAF's first missions of the Second World War, No.5 Squadron's air and ground crews had

to persevere in coaxing their under-powered but sturdy Stranraer flying boats to exceed their normal performance limits in the worst flying conditions in the world. Mastering the skills of over-water navigation in abysmal weather, the procedures for protecting a convoy, and rendezvousing with allied warships at sea provided the crews experience in bomber reconnaissance operations and prepared them for their forthcoming wartime roles. After converting to their new Cansos the crews faced the challenges of adapting to the aircraft's inherent new capabilities and learning the subtleties of anti-submarine warfare.

Following the delivery of Cansos in September 1941, No.5 Squadron flew its Stranraers to the Pacific coast where they joined the Stranraers initially delivered to the west coast in September 1939. The Stranraers were assigned to Western Air Command and formed five Bomber Reconnaissance squadrons based in British Columbia at RCAF Stations: Ucluelet, (4 BR); Alliford Bay, (6 BR); Prince Rupert, (7 BR); Bella Bella, (9 BR), and Coal Harbour, (120 BR). In April 1943, all five Bomber Reconnaissance squadrons started to replace their Stranraers with long-range Cansos which gave improved coverage of their eastern Pacific patrol areas. By 1944, after six years of reliable service, most Stranraers had been withdrawn from operations but remained on RCAF strength until 1946. After the war many Stranraers were sold to fledgling regional airlines. Most notably, Queen Charlotte Airlines continued to fly Stranraers well into the 1950s, operating from Vancouver and providing passenger and freight service along British Columbia's Pacific coast.

Only two Stranraers remain in existence, RCAF serial number 920 has been pristinely restored and is on display at the RAF Museum at Hendon in London, England. In homage to its Canadian heritage, it has been finished in the markings and silver paint scheme of the RCAF's No.5 (BR) squadron. The wreckage of RCAF Stranraer, serial number 915, was shipped by rail from Pender Harbour, BC to the Shearwater Aviation Museum in 2008. When restoration is completed in the finish and markings of No.5 (BR) Squadron, it will be a rare exhibit of an early chapter in 12 Wing Shearwater's (formerly RCAF Station Dartmouth) remarkable history.



Stranraer from No.5 (GR) Sqn lands on Eastern Passage at RCAF Dartmouth



Into The Delta

ATTON Florance “ Janet”	Jul 2022
BROWNE Allan George	Jan 2022
BURKE Stanley Louis “Sonny”	Jun 2022
CHEATERS Ronald Charles	Jun 2022
CHIASSON Joseph Raymond	May 2022
CONDRAN John James Brian	Apr 2022
HARDY Robert George	Jun 2021
GAUTHIER Michael	Jun 2022
MACKINNON Colin Norman	May 2022
O'REILLY Nancy	Jul 2022
ODLAND Thomas William	Mar 2022
RILEY Merlin Weldon	Apr 2022
ROBINSON Franklin H.E.	Jun 2022
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HMCS REGINA sails through the South China Sea during
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Photo: Master Corporal Alexandre Gagnon XA01-2019-0035-234